
Foreword

Budget figures reveal far more about proposed policy than speeches.

U.S. President Harry S. Truman

It would be hard to imagine a more timely book to confront the overwhelming gloom and doom atmosphere in which American education is currently shrouded than this one. The deep recession in the nation's financial heartland on Wall Street has prompted a search for funds to keep school systems afloat and avoid debilitating layoffs and reductions in basic educational programs. Today, school system administrators are considering such dire antidotes to fiscal exigencies as moving to a four-day work week, closing dozens of schools, furloughing or cutting back on teachers, and other drastic remedies once thought ill-advised in order to reduce costs to match shrinking revenues.

The lack of progress in advancing student achievement in the nation's inner city schools such as Kansas City and Detroit is resulting in greater pushes for privatization, and more critics saying that U.S. public education hasn't got any better despite billions of dollars spent to improve it. Such criticism ignores the fact that there is no national system of education in the United States, but rather fifty different systems of education and many subunits, called school districts, within each of those. It is here that we can locate the basic responsibilities for educating our children.

So readers should know that Bill Poston is an educator first and an educational financial analyst second. He is a former math and physics teacher, middle school principal, and superintendent of schools in Arizona and Montana. He has fought the budget wars and won most of them in his career. In the process, he conducted workshops and staff development sessions on performance-based budgeting all over the country. He was the executive director of the Iowa School Business Management Academy for over 15 years and a professor of educational administration for 15 years at Iowa State University in Ames, Iowa.

What makes Bill Poston different from other writers about school budgeting is that he has never "confused things of logic for the logic of things" (Bourdieu, 1998,

p. 101), meaning he understands that budgets are the means to educational ends and are not ends themselves. He also understands that budget priorities reflect the unique values held dear by Americans and are highly localized wherever Americans may live and work. So this book about performance-based budgeting is the means for locally elected or appointed boards of education and their superintendents to use the always scarce resources from taxes to attain more of their valued ends than before and avoid the dire cutbacks which threaten the viability and vibrancy of our local educational systems during these hard times.

The advice in this book is hard-earned wisdom—it's from an educator who has walked the walk. Bill Poston is not an armchair theorist or policy wonk writing in a think tank cubicle whose only connections to the real world are blogs, web pages and thin-aired theoretical arguments of esoteric quantitative mole hills. He's a former U.S. marine who is the youngest elected international president of Phi Delta Kappa in its history, and an administrator who has "been there." I've always admired how Bill keeps his feet on the ground and finds a way to teach through his wonderful stories he has collected over a long and distinguished career, and how he brings his experience home to make a difference for thousands of children, in classrooms all over America, who may never know his name, but who have benefited from his advice, caring, and hard-nosed compassion.

—Fenwick W. English

*R. Wendell Eaves Senior Distinguished
Professor of Educational Leadership
School of Education, University of North
Carolina at Chapel Hill*